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ABSTRACT

Tracing the development of "concept of story" in one child from age three years to five years using the language experience task, a hierarchy of text/context relationships emerges. First there is the inventory stage whereby the child names and describes behaviors to objects. The second stage is descriptive and the child modifies the object and the action of the object beyond the situational context. The third stage is textual and involves text features such as whether the work is fiction or informational. Language strategies that are used include (1) predicting from what is known about print, and (2) editing--refining, elaborating, extending, and coordinating meaning. To understand the child's concept of story, educators need to look at story composition in different contexts, such as having students write their own stories, write stories from pictures, or reading a book. Each of these different contexts allows the child opportunities for examining and using alternate features of standard convention. (HOD)

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THE YOUNG CHILD'S CONCEPT OF STORY

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TEXT

Today I wish to discuss the young child's concept of story.

The Language Experience task was used to elicit 1) the kinds of understandings children have of the concept of story in the writer/reader role, and 2) the language strategies used by the writer/reader in this particular context.

In the Language Experience task, the child and researcher first talked about their favorite story. The child was then asked to choose 3 or 4 toys from a box which could be used in making up a story. The child composed a story and dictated it to the researcher scribe. When the story was printed, the child was asked to read the story. One day later, the child was asked to re-read the story.

I shall discuss the development of Nathan's "concept of story" from age 3 years 1 month to 5 years 1 month.

What has been the evolution of text/context relationships for Nathan in his 5

SUPPORT MATERIALS

IRA Symposium:
Language Users:
Communication Strategies
And Curriculum Implications

May, 1980-St. Louis

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stories collected every six months from 3 years 1 month on?	
In story I, Nathan picked the toys, an elephant and a gun. His dictation was a dialogue between himself and the researcher. It was closely tied to the pragmatics of the Language Experience settings. His story read:	(Show #1 story overhead)
An elephant like this one.	(Refers to elephant)
Elephant eats you.	
He shoots you.	(Using gun to shoot)
In this story, Nathan has chosen 2 toys and his story is an inventory of behavior.	
In story 2, the following toys were picked: a gun, car, candle, elephant. When the researcher asked, "What do you want me to write?" Nathan said, "Write this down, say,"	
This is a story.	(Show story 2, overhead)
This elephant.	
This car.	
This candle.	
Again, Nathan is having a dialogue with the researcher. Story 2 is an inventory of the objects chosen. In the Inventory Level the concept of text and context are not distinguishable. The text is immediately	

TEXT	SUPPORT MATERIALS
available by the objects or the child's own actions toward the object in this context.	
A truck, gun, airplane and elephant were chosen by Nathan to compose a story. Nathan begins his story by inventorying the objects chosen. He dictates, in story 3	
Lion, (the elephant represents another animal), an elephant, airplane and then truck and gun.	(Show #3 story overhead)
In the last two statements Nathan moves beyond the Inventory Level to the Descriptive Level by providing information about the actions of the objects beyond the situational context. His story reads:	
A tire of the truck flew off and blew up the windows. Then the gun shot the mountains.	
In story 4, Nathan remains at the Descriptive Level in story composition. A gun, elephant and eraser are the toys picked. Nathan chose to transform the eraser in this situation to represent a boat. He dictates:	(Show #4 story overhead)
I'd like to go to California and shoot people.	(He shoots gun)
Throw an elephant at the tiger	(He pretends to throw elephant
and throw the bomb at the boat and shoot the gun at the boat.	(He shoots gun several times.)

TEXT	SUPPORT MATERIALS
Story 4 is interesting because the text stands alone, more or less. Nathan is very involved with the objects in this setting. (i.e., shooting gun, pretending to throw elephant) and he has carefully described each object picked. But, his description of each are extended beyond this situation.	
Nathan's fifth story moves to a higher level of text/context relationships. His composition now has the text features of fiction. Nathan chose the truck, airplane, dollar and money clip. In composing his story, Nathan borrowed from his past experience with story grammar of Fred Flintstone and dictated:	(Show #5 story overhead)
Fred Flintstone banged into a airplane. He fell into a ditch and he lost his money and his pin he lost. And then Fred Flintstone got out of the ditch and then he found his money and his pin.	
To story 5 it is possible to apply Stein's story grammar analysis. Fred Flintsonte is the protagonist. The setting includes banging into an airplane which	

TEXT	SUPPORT MATERIALS

cause him to fall into a ditch and loose his money and pin (the initiating event). He gets out of the ditch (response) and (the consequence) he found his money and pin. This story would fit Stein's reactive episode category.

As a writer, Nathan's evolution of "concept of story" illustrates well our proposed hierarchy of text/context relationships from analyzing many Language Experience stories.

1. Inventory a. naming
   b. describing behaviors to objects.
2. Descriptive: Inventory + Extension
   a. modification of object beyond situational context.
   b. modification of actions of object beyond situational context.
3. Textual: Text features
   a. Fiction
   b. Informational

In re-looking at Nathan's five stories we can see that his stories over time included all levels and subsets except informational (3b). The summary chart helps

TEXT - CONTEXT RELATIONSHIPS

1. INVENTORY:
   a. naming
   b. describing behaviors to object
2. DESCRIPTIVE: Inventory + Extension
   a. modification of object beyond situational context
   b. modification of actions of object beyond situational context
3. TEXTUAL: Text Features
   a. Fictional
   b. Informational

Harste, Woodward, Burke 1979

(Show text/context relationship overhead)

SUMMARY TEXT/CONTEXT RELATIONSHIPS

Story 1 Inventory (B)	Story 2 Inventory (A)	Story 3 Inventory (A) + Descriptive (B)
A elephant like this one. Elephant eats you. He shoots you.	This is a story. This elephant. This car. This candle	Lion, and elephant, airplane, and then truck and gun. A tire of the truck flew off and blew up the windows. Then the gun shot the mountains.

Story 4 Descriptive (A)	Story 5 Textual (A)
I'd like to go to California and shoot people. Throw an elephant at the tire. And throw the bomb at the boat. And shoot the gun at the boat.	Fred Flintstone banged into a airplane. He fell into a ditch and he lost his money and his pin. And then Fred Flintstone got out of the ditch and then he found his money and his pin.

(Show summary chart)

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TEXT	SUPPORT MATERIALS
us to understand more clearly how Nathan explicitly or implicitly included particular level(s) of inventory, descriptive or textual in his writings. In stories 1, 2, 3, he explicitly expressed the inventory level using both a + b in different stories. In story 3 he included two levels explicitly--the inventory and descriptive. Story 4 was Descriptive (a). In story 5, we see the implicit use of the inventory level since the Fred Flintstone story used all the toys selected. The description of the objects was implicitly expressed also as Nathan utilized a fictional story grammar. The use of anyone of the levels is considered story to the young child. I suggest that the inventory and the descriptive levels of text/context relationships are precursers for the textual level. Therefore I suspect it is a continuum through which all writers proceed. In different story writing contexts children as well as adults will explicitly or implicitly express various levels as they compose stories. Now I wish to discuss the child's use of language strategies as a reader in the Language Experience situation.	

TEXT	SUPPORT MATERIALS
Strategy I is Predicting from what you know about print. In the Language Experience task the child's story is printed on a paper. Then the child is asked to read his story. One day later the child is asked to re-read the story. In reading the story immediately after it was printed Nathan age 3.1 said, "I'll count the h's". He pointed to the "h" in this, elephant, and shooting counting one, two, three. Nathan is aware of print, the letters on the paper, and their names. In the reading task, he focused on the features of form of written language rather than the semantics. In the task of reading and re-reading story 2, Nathan age 3.6 maintained the inventory level of his composition. He underlined each line in the first reading repeating Nathan **to represent meaning for each line of print.** For re-reading he drew from the story composition situational context. As researcher I had used a Curious George episode as my favorite story. This time Nathan read and underlined each line labelling it Curious George. His focus was on	(Show story #1 overhead) A elephant like this elephant. Elephant eats you. He shot you. (Show story #2 overhead) This is a story. This elephant. This car. This candle.

TEXT	SUPPORT MATERIALS
the message each line presented. Nathan, age 4.6 responded, "I can't read" as he was introduced to both reading tasks of story 4. I said, "Read it the best you can." Nathan focused on the last line on the paper. He read, "The shoot the boat with a gun" in reading and "The gun shot the boat" in re-reading. In both instances Nathan is aware that that line of text place-holds a message. His attempts to mean are related to that print on the page and are closely tied to the particular parameters of the story. As we have seen in the reading responses to the 3 stories, Nathan has negotiated what print he is attending to today. In a story writing task in our N.I.E. study, children and the researcher each used pen and paper to write their stories. As researcher I observed that children in this task where they were the writers seldom responded "I can't read" but eagerly read what they wrote. It appears that where the child has personal responsibility for the task of writing it makes the reading tas	(Show story #4 overhead) I'd like to go to California and shoot people. Throw an elephant at the tiger. And throw the bomb at the boat. And shoot the gun at the boat

TEXT	SUPPORT MATERIALS
more manageable. Where we have assumed we are making the writing task easier by being the scribe in the Language Experience task, we might actually be making the reading task less approachable.	
The response of Nathan, "Anyways I can't read" was a response used by some children of all ages to the Language Experience tasks in the Proffitt, N.I.E. and my N.C.T.E Longitudinal Study of which Nathan is a subject. This phenomena needs further study.	
Strategy 2 is called Editing.	
As readers of their own compositions children use the strategy of editing each time they read the text. Editing means that each reading session becomes a new setting for refining, elaborating, extending and coordinating meaning.	
In both story 3 and 5 Nathan uses editing as a strategy each time he reads the story. I'll use story 5 to illustrate the semantic monitoring which Nathan, age 5.1 is doing. His dictation reads:	(Show story #5 overhead)
Fred Flintstone banged into a airplane. He fell into a ditch and he	

TEXT	SUPPORT MATERIALS
lost his money and his pin he lost. And then Fred Flintstone got out of the ditch and then he found his money and his pin. Comparing reading to dictation his story reads: Fred Flintstone was riding by and he crashed into a airplane. And he fell into a ditch and then he got out and he walked and he walked and walked and walked and walked and walked and walked and walked. Then finally he found his money and pin. In this reading; it is not as clear where Fred Flintstone lost his money. The re-reading shows Nathan re-examining his text and making changes from his initial composition. Fred Flintstone was riding down the road and he came to a airplane and he fell into the ditch. He finally got out and he kept walking and walking and walking and walking and walking and walking until he found his money and pin. In this reading we are not clear why he fell in the ditch and where he lost his money. Looking at the same three texts for the basic units of meaning, I did propositional	Fred Flintstone banged into a airplane. He fell into a ditch and he lost his money and his pin he lost. And then Fred Flintstone got out of the ditch and he found his money and his pin.

TEXT

analysis à là Kintsch, Turner and Green.

This figure of the 1st sentence of each text illustrates how Nathan continues to re-think, re-explicate in his attempt to mean. In dictation there was 1 proposition, in reading 3, and re-reading 5. He maintained no propositions from dictation through the 2 readings but generated new ones for each text.

Propositional analysis of total texts shows the same active generation of new units of meaning within the same semantic parameters.

Dictation	Reading	Re-reading
16 Propositions	22 Propositions	22 Propositions
	6 Maintained	5 Maintained
	22 Generated	17 Generated

Some adult judges might say that the story dictation seems to be the best formed story. To some the reading texts may seem like regressions since the texts lacked clarity on where money was lost and why F. F. fell into the ditch. By holding an adult template "of well formed story" over children's products we tend to overlook the processes and strategies they are using to mean.

SUPPORT MATERIALS

(Show Propositions for first sentences in each text.)

	DICTATION	READING	RE-READING
Text	Fred Flintstone banged into a airplane.	Fred Flintstone was riding by and he crashed into a airplane.	Fred Flintstone was riding down the road and he came to a airplane and he fell into the ditch.
Propositions	1. (BANG INTO, FF, AIRPLANE)	1. (RIDE BY, FF, ø) 2. (CRASH INTO, FF^A, AIRPLANE) 3. (CONJ: AND, (1), (2))	1. (RIDE DOWN, FF, ROAD) 2. (COME TO FF^A, AIRPLANE) 3. (CONJ: AND, (1), (2)) 4. (FALL INTO, FF^A, DITCH) 5. (CONJ: AND, (2), (4))

(Show Propositional Analysis Figure)

PROPOSITIONAL ANALYSIS
Nathan's Story 5

DICTATION	READING	RE-READING
16 Propositions	28 Propositions	22 Propositions
	6 Maintained	5 Maintained
	22 Generated	17 Generated

(Show story #5 again)

Fred Flintstone banged into a airplane. He fell into a ditch and he lost his money and his pin he lost. And then Fred Flintstone got out of the ditch and he found his money and his pin.

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TEXT

SUPPORT MATERIALS

Yes, some story texts do stand better alone than others. But, each text generated by Nathan for this 5th Language Experience task did have the same semantic parameters. Each encounter dictating, reading and re-reading allowed him to orchestrate his concept of story, knowledge of language systems, and the pragmatics of this research context in order to extend and coordinate meaning.

To Conclude:

1. Four of Nathan's stories did not fit the adult template of fictional story. But, by studying closely his compositions and readings of the stories, Nathan has given us, the researchers, new insights into the continuum authors follow in communicating through print.

2. In looking at Nathan as a writer and a reader we have seen the inter-relationship of the reading and writing task. In the task of writing, a person experiences how another person thinks and this sets the person up for comprehension. Through the reading process one learns the editing process necessary in writing.

TEXT	SUPPORT MATERIALS
3. If we really want to understand the child's concept of story, we need to look at story composition in different contexts--i.e., writing own story, writing story from pictures, or reading a book to name several. Each of these different contexts allows the child opportunity for examining and using alternate features of standard convention.	

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